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ABSTRACT

Early field experiences for preservice teachers can serve as a catalyst for the development of new insights and instructional techniques, particularly if they are in diverse settings. This study provided one preservice teacher with two 30-hour field experience components at two diverse sites. The project involved a comparative analysis of two site-based teacher evaluation field experiences within a large school corporation in the midwest. The student observer conducted 30 hours of required field observation at each site over the course of two semesters. One site was in a large, traditional public high school, and the other site was in an alternative school-based program for habitual behavioral offenders. The student observer conducted interviews with students, teachers, and administrators throughout the observational period and compiled a subsequent field experience journal to reflect the activities. She observed behavioral issues, instructional methods, educational environments, and teacher effectiveness. Analysis of the observations indicated that each site's instructional intent inculcated students' self-responsibility. Each site effectively achieved its goals using dichotomous approaches in classroom management. The variability of student background made each site unique and responsive to its students' academic, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional needs. (Contains 21 references.) (SM)

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A COMPARISION OF TWO DICHOTOMOUS FIELD EXPERIENCE SITES: PERSPECTIVES OF A PRE-SERVICE TEACHER

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A COMPARISION OF TWO DICHOTOMOUS FIELD EXPERIENCE SITES: PERSPECTIVES OF A PRE-SERVICE TEACHER

Introduction

Teachers play a vital role in stimulating student learning and early field experiences for pre-service teachers can serve as a catalyst for the development of new insights and instructional techniques for the perspective educator. Multiple early field experiences in diverse settings can also serve to stimulate the pre-professional life experiences of these students (Colville-Hall, MacDonald, Smolen, 1995; Gay, 1988; Garibaldi, 1992; Villegas, 1991).

Although some general principles and characteristics of the teaching profession may have broad universal applicability (Good & Brophy, 1994), the teaching profession still exists as a multifaceted occupation, complex in its participants' content knowledge and continuously evolving in an interpersonal content. It may never be possible to compile a list of all possible instructional techniques that pre-service teachers may use for resources however, it is critical that these educators be guided by a sound set of principles from which they can use existing strategies while developing new ideas as they construct a pedagogy of sound instructional base. As Brophy states, effective teaching requires the ability to implement large numbers of diagnostic, instructional, managerial and therapeutic skills (Brophy & Evertson,1976). Effective teachers must be able to do a variety of things at any given instant, while having the ability to recognize how their abilities are applied to a classroom setting. Because these characteristics are essential to

the professional educator, it becomes critical that pre-service teachers in university teacher education programs be provided the opportunity for multiple field experiences in diverse settings while under the supervision of instructors that are equally diverse in personality and instructional style.

Field Experiences

Many in the research community would also suggest that an essential component of pre-service field experiences should lie within a multicultural setting (Banks, 1983, 1991; Deering and Stanutz, 1995; Rosenman,1987). Sleeter and Grant (1986) go as far to say that the teachers unfamiliar with or insensitive to minority students' needs unconsciously make the learning process more difficult for them. Although a case can be made for the value of multicultural experiences, McDiarmid and Price (1990) found that typical multicultural education courses in teacher education programs may contribute to prospective teachers' stereotyping of minority students. Cooper and his colleagues (Cooper, Beare, and Thorman, 1990) found that pre-service teachers who self-selected to complete a field experience in a cultural setting location different from their immediate university community were more sensitive to multicultural issues. Although the issue of self - selection may be a contributing factor to the response of these pre-service teachers, it is clear that multicultural field experiences should be an essential component of all teacher education programs.

Self-Efficacy

Another important outcome of preservice field experience programs should be the observation of teacher self-efficacy and the impact these professionals may have on teachers on student self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as the extent to how one regards their confidence or abilities in a specific content area . Additionally, he argued that an individual's efficacy beliefs influence motivation in several ways. Students may tend to avoid activities they believe are beyond their capabilities so they selectively choose easier tasks. The amount of effort students invest in an activity and their persistence at difficult tasks are also linked to self-efficacy. The greater our self-efficacy the greater our effort and persistence will be thus leading to greater academic achievement. Ames (1984) and Nichols (Nichols & Miller,1994) have found that student's self-perceptions of ability (self-efficacy) are positively related to achievement and student motivation. These same results might also be observed as outcomes of teacher efficacy as they might possibly impact curricular decisions and interpersonal student-teacher relationships. The techniques that teachers in the field use to promote student self-efficacy while also generating their own self-efficacious outlook on their abilities and the profession can be a valuable resource for pre-service teachers to observe.

Classroom Management

It will never be possible to compile a list of all possible techniques to be used when problem behaviors occur in the classroom. Formulas fail to fit all situations therefore it is important that pre-service educators be guided by a sound set of principles

and guidelines from which they can use existing strategies while maintaining the flexibility to develop new teaching techniques to enhance the learning experience. Classroom management involves not only a mere effective response when problems occur, but preventing problems from occurring frequently (Brophy,1983). Mansfield and his colleagues (1991) have also observed that 44% of teachers nationwide reported that student misbehavior interfered substantially with their teaching. Surveys of teacher effectiveness report that classroom management skills are of primary importance in determining teaching success. Management skills are crucial and fundamental and pre-service teachers that are inadequate in these skills will have difficulty accomplishing their instructional objectives (Brophy & Evertson, 1976). In a recent meta-analysis of factors influencing student learning, classroom management was identified as the most important factor (Wang, Haertel & Walberg,1993). Certainly the ability to manage the broad spectrum of classroom factors needs to be a key component in a teachers' repertoire.

Since the inception of the annual Gallop Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools in 1969, classroom management and school discipline has been the public's primary educational concern on 16 occasions. From 1986 to 1991, discipline was viewed as second to drug use as the biggest problem facing public schools. Teachers also express concern about student behavior. In a 1987 study for the Center for Educational Statistics, 44% of public school teachers reported more disruptive classroom behavior in their schools than five years earlier. Gump (1967) reported that approximately half of teacher's actions involved instruction while the rest of the teacher's behavior involved management functions, dealing with misbehavior, and handling individual student problems. Doyle (1986) also presents evidence that student learning is directly related to

classroom order. The evidence is clear that classroom management and discipline issues are a major source of frustration and concern for teachers in the field and teacher education programs should provide ample opportunity to preservice teachers to observe field settings that have the potential to provide problematic issues for them to observe.

The purpose of this investigation was to expand the opportunities of a pre-service teacher education student by providing two thirty-hour field experience components in her professional education experience at two diverse sites. Her observations and commentary reflect the diversity of these sites and the valuable resource that a field experience component may have in the continuing professional development of pre-service teachers.

Method

This research project involved a comparative analysis of two site based teacher evaluation field experiences within a large school corporation in the Midwest. The student observer conducted 30 hours of required field observation at each site during two semesters. One of the field sites was located in a large public high school in a traditional educational setting, while the second site was located at an alternative school-based program designed for habitual behavioral offenders. The student observer conducted interviews with students, teachers, and administrators throughout the observational period and a subsequent field experience journal was compiled to reflect these activities.

Sites

Two different sites were observed for this project. Site 1 was located in a traditional middle class public high school (grades 9-12) setting where observations and interviews were completed within the English department. Twenty percent of the student population at this site (total school population approximately 1,500) were designated as minority students. An initial agreement with the school allowed the student observer to observe several teachers during student instructional time within the English department during the 30-hour observation, and also allowed observations and discussions with faculty at lunch and in the teacher workroom during conference and preparation periods.

Site 2 was located at an inner-city alternative school site where junior high and high school classes were observed. At this location, minority students comprised 80% of the school population. This site housed around 200 students at any one time during the school year offering two levels of academic and behavioral achievement that ideally would result in the students' return to their home school site after 18 weeks. Although this site followed the state and locally mandated curriculum, maintaining and controlling behavioral outbursts and developing social and "life skills" were a major thrust of the daily instructional activities.

The following observations and comments are excerpts taken from the student observer's field journal.

Results and Observations

Behavioral Issues

Student behavioral problems were the norm at the alternative site program. Students were enrolled for eighteen weeks at the site in order to learn how to control their impulsive behaviors in the classroom. Upon completion of the program, the goal was to have students return to their traditional school setting and use their newly acquired behavioral skills in the classroom. Acquiring these behavioral skills was the central theme for the students and inculcating these skills was the major focus and effort of the site instructors. For example, Mr. B's eighth grade class consisted of eighteen students; three of the eighteen were recent additions to the program. Mr. B greeted each new student at the door of his classroom at the beginning of each day; he shook each students' hand, introduced himself, and assigned students to their seats. Mr. B spoke to the class, "May I have your attention?" He repeated his request in a louder voice, "May I have your attention? Check your body basics! Eye and body posture to the front! To be successful I'll need to work with you, and you'll have to work with me. Remember, your are responsible for your own behavior. Not me!"

Once the students' attention was fully acquired, Mr. B proceeded with the day's social studies assignment. As the textbooks were opened by the students, Mr. B attempted to begin instruction as verbal outbursts coupled with mobile physical distractions ensued from students. For example, Neitta looked around the class for someone with whom she could make eye contact; her connection was Karl. Neitta spoke Pig Latin, Karl laughed at Neitta, Dan's elbow jabbed Preston, Jay turned in his seat and threw a spit ball at Dan, Ben, in a full seat spin, turned and told Jay to knock it off, and Kristie yelled in full cry that Jay said something vulgar to her! Mr. B. stopped and

listened to the hullabaloo between the students. In a composed manner, yet in a loud authoritative voice exclaimed, "Excuse me! Excuse me! May I have your attention?" Silence and order was restored for the moment. Mr. B continued, "Thank you! Jay come fill out a D/D (Describe and Define Your Behavior) slip [This is part of the Glasser Discipline Model used at this program]! Remember class, that how you present yourself is the building blocks on how you present yourself in life! Sit up straight, look ahead! Do your have your class materials? Be prepared! Furthermore, when someone else has the floor we need to be respectful to them; in turn they will do the same for you."

Each day, Mr. B consistently monitored his students' physical activities, their verbal outbursts and their body language. Similar to the example above, Mr. B always addressed his students' inappropriate behavioral paroxysms utilizing the same consistent method.

Observations at the traditional setting rendered different findings in regard to students' behavior. Behavioral problems were minimal, almost non-existent. For example, Mr. H's junior English Literature class was comprised of twenty-five to thirty students. The students were six weeks into their semester and therefore familiar with Mr. H. He told his students to come to class prepared and be ready to discuss and they complied with his request on a daily basis. There would be no slow starts at the beginning of class because they knew him and what he expected of them. He said, "I'm not easy! I'm preparing you for what lies ahead." Mr. H. walked from group to group as cooperative learning techniques were used to monitor discussion and assist in discussion if it was warranted. The last group he approached included a girl with a poor attitude and a sassy mouth. He possessed little patience for her antics. He informed her to pack up

her belongings and step into the hallway. Mr. H. followed her into the hallway and within a couple of minutes he reappeared (alone), and it was back to business. He apologized to the class for the disruption the girl made to their learning. Mr. H. never deviated from his approach in handling students' behavioral problems. Like Mr. B., Mr. H consistently monitored his students' physical activities and body language.

It behooves pre-service teachers to explore opposing educational settings in order to observe the various developmental behaviors of students. A distinct difference in these dichotomous educational sites lies in the preexisting inappropriate behaviors of the students at the alternative based program verses the preexisting appropriate behaviors of the students in the traditional setting. Witnessing the various methods of classroom management employed by the teachers of each site was a worthwhile experience for me. The instructor at the alternative based program was an advocate of Glasser's Reality Therapy model of classroom management. Conversely, the instructor at the traditional setting was a proponent of Canter's Assertive Discipline Model. On-site observations and participation in the classroom will benefit the pre-service teacher in ascertaining whether or not either of these classroom management models would prove effective in his/her classroom. In addition, pre-service teachers will discover the advantages in reviewing the characteristics and management techniques of effective teachers in opposing settings. They can determine which educational setting best suits their personality strengths and attributes. This observer concludes that several characteristics of an effective teacher at an alternative based program were essential for success and survival. Even temperament, optimistic attitudes with the students, physical stamina, extreme tolerance levels of unstable situations, and dedication to kids who have skill

deficiencies in areas other than academic areas were all admirable attributes. The characteristics of an effective instructor in the traditional setting include these same characteristics; however, the instructor did not encounter the constant interruptions to his classroom all day, everyday, by all of his students (all at once). Subsequently, he was allowed to focus more on instructional presentation and student cognitive development at a deeper level of understanding and involvement.

Instructional Methods

The predominate instruction technique employed by the teacher at the traditional educational site was a direct instructional method. Once the lecture format was completed for the day, group discussion ensued over the day's material. Following the discussion, the remainder of the period was reserved for one of two possible options. First, the option of small group assignments i.e. note cards, which contained key terms or topics, were distributed to all members of each group. Group members discussed the key points; however, each member was responsible for his/her own answer or opinion development. Groups were randomly selected and individual member called upon for his/her answers. The second option was reading the assignment for the next day. Both options were encouraged by the teacher and frequently utilized by the students.

At the alternative based program, the teacher exercised a direct instruction method on a daily basis. The only variance to the pattern was the occasional incorporation of supplemental worksheets for the students to work on individually in class.

The implications for pre-service educators who find the alternative based programs of interest may find the lack of variety in the instruction and the lack of small

group tasks limiting. It must be noted, however that due to the extensive behavioral problems of the students at the program, the direct instruction method proved most effective for the class because it allowed for minimal behavioral disruptions. Small group tasks and interaction equated to classroom pandemonium. The implications for pre-professional educators who desire a traditional setting will find an exchange of equal benefits between the students and teacher. The small group assignments provided interaction and tutoring among peers. It promoted the concept that each group member could make a significant contribution to that group. Small groups promoted individual accountability. The benefits the teacher acquired from the small groups was the opportunity to work with any group or individual who did not understand the key points. The large group discussion was also valuable to the students and teacher with the primary benefit being the mutual exchange and the promotion of understanding another's perspective.

Educational Environment

At each field experience site, the relationship between the teacher and students was positive and supportive of student needs. The fact that the students at the alternative based program were engaged with their teacher for no more than 18 weeks a resulted in no negative consequences from their short term interactions. Likewise, the students at the traditional educational site exhibited positive and supportive interactions with their teacher. At each site, students knew upon entering the classroom the expectations required of them. The instructor exhibits a rationale so that students know what their purpose needs to be. The students in this setting realized that a high school education and

diploma were critical to their futures as successful adults. Their instructor was to prepare them to attain those goals. The students worked with the teacher because the teacher was willing to work with them therefore, the educational setting becomes a joint venture to support instructional and learning experiences.

The students at the alternative based program realized in order to return and continue at their traditional school setting, appropriate behaviors needed to be acquired and exhibited inside and outside of the classroom. The students took ownership of their inappropriate behaviors. The teacher then worked with the students on respect issues. For the students to be successful in school and life, they needed to learn that in order to earn respect one has to give respect. The implications are that the long-term relationships between the teacher and students, as witnessed in the traditional educational setting, are as strong and positive as the short term relationships between teacher and students at the alternative based program. The dual-fold benefit pre-professional educators gain from either educational site lies in helping and preparing students for the actualization of their short term goals and supporting the realization of their life goals.

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy appeared to be high at each instructional site. The constant challenge for the instructor at the traditional setting was one of making his students better thinkers. For 14 years, he believed his job was to query his students' thoughts. If he did not stay on top of the challenge daily, he would lose his students' interest. In addition, he did not see his job as teacher to be the sole dispenser of information and the sole processor of information. The danger for the students was when he would do all the

thinking for them. In his opinion, an effective teacher has productive students(mentally and physically). The teacher's conviction lies in his dedication to the preparation of his students for what lies ahead of them in academia and in life.

For eight years, the constant change for the instructor at the alternative educational program was to inculcate in students the knowledge of how to make better choices, to make smart choices for appropriate behaviors in and outside the classroom. His students were kids; kids who needed instruction, attention and nurturing in all skill areas of life. His personal conviction lies in his daily contribution to the overall academic development and personal social development of individual students.

The implications for pre-service teachers who question the experienced teacher's efficacy levels will find that the teacher's years of service and the stress from the demands of a particular job setting, foster negative attitudes in some teachers toward their students or kids in general.

Observer Summary

The students who attended the alternative based program exhibited severe and disruptive patterns of behavior within the classroom; whereas, the students in the traditional educational setting exhibited minimal behavior problems. Each site operated from dichotomous approaches to classroom management. The alternative program employed a moderate power approach to eliminate students' misconduct; whereas, the traditional educational site maintained using through a maximum power techniques. The characteristics exhibited for an effective teacher within the opposing settings were

identical; however, the stress level for an instructor at the alternative based program would require a much higher degree of supportive effort along with physical stamina.

The predominate mode of academic instruction at the traditional educational site was supportive of a direct instructional method approach with indirect techniques (cooperative learning etc.) used to supplement straightforward information delivery. At the alternative based program, the lecture format was the sole method of instruction. Due to minimal behavioral disruptions at the traditional site, the teacher pursued large group discussions and small group assignments. The diverse options allowed for additional teaching and learning opportunities. These varied options were not feasible or advisable for the teachers at the alternative based program due to the possible behavioral outbursts that might result from flexible management and non-restrictive or permissive controls on students.

The relationships between the teacher and the students at each of these sites were equally strong and supportive. The students at each educational site realized the expectations placed upon them. In this regard, they were compliant with the teachers' aims, and they willing acquiesced in their work toward their respective goals although the difficulty was more apparent in the alternative setting. The teacher efficacy appeared to be high at each instructional setting though again the alternative site provided greater day-to-day challenges and struggles for many teacher participants. The personal philosophies and convictions held by each instructor served as the prevailing forces which propelled them and sustained them in their chosen field site in the educational arena.

Conclusion

Analysis of these observations suggest that each site's instructional intent inculcates students' self-responsibility. Additionally, each site effectively achieved their goals using dichotomous approaches in classroom management. The variability of student backgrounds make each site unique and responsive to the academic, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional needs of their students. The response is clearly a result of teacher professionals at each site who maintain the vigil of the educational community unique to their specific setting.

These findings provide advantageous information to pre-professional educators who seek confirmation of their existing knowledge base. In addition, these early experiences provides information for the future educators' supplemental directives that can be incorporated into their daily instruction methods in a variety of educational venues. By allowing the diversity in field experience settings, students receive the opportunity to observe traditional and unique settings that may impact future career decisions as they complete university courses and begin the student teaching experience as the culmination of their pre-professional development.

Although several researchers would suggest that diverse field experiences offer substantial multicultural advantages and benefits to the student observer (Banks,1983; Deering & Stanmutz,1995; Rosenman,1997; Sleeter & Grant,1986), the opportunity to observe diverse instructional styles and classroom management techniques offer equally important experiences for students. Whether students eventually gain employment in urban, rural, or suburbia settings, the opportunity to observe the mainstays of

instructional delivery and classroom management from a variety of sources is invaluable information.

In terms of self-fulfillment and teacher efficacy, teachers experience these constructs in a variety of settings and use a multitude of techniques to maintain balance in their professional and personal lives. Although continued research is needed to explore issues of teacher self-efficacy and longevity, it is equally important for pre-service educators to recognize these important factors of "teacher well-being" in support of their own eventual professional careers.

In summary, early field experiences are valuable resources for students in teacher education programs. The diversity of these field experience sites can only serve to support the evolution of a rich knowledge base necessary for effective professional educators. Comments from this student observer serve to support the effort of teacher education programs who seek to provide diverse, rich experiences for the pre-professional educator. It is to the benefit of the professional community and teacher education programs and their students to continue to support diversity options in field experience settings. They are a valuable resource for a prospective educators' professional development.

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